

## Guide to Reading

**Main Idea**

In the years following World War I, aggressive and expansionist governments took power in both Europe and Asia.

**Key Terms and Names**

Benito Mussolini, fascism, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Manchuria, Neutrality Act of 1935, internationalism

**Reading Strategy**

**Taking Notes** As you read about the events in Europe and Asia after World War I, use the major headings of the section to create an outline similar to the one below.

America and the World  
I. The Rise of Dictators  
A.  
B.  
C.  
D.  
II.

**Reading Objectives**

- **Describe** how postwar conditions contributed to the rise of antidemocratic governments in Europe.
- **Explain** why many Americans supported a policy of isolationism in the 1930s.

**Section Theme**

**Global Connections** German and Japanese actions in the 1930s led President Roosevelt to work to prevent aggression.

**Preview of Events**

◆ 1922

**1922**

Fascist Party takes power in Italy; USSR established

◆ 1927

**1931**

Japan takes control of Manchuria

◆ 1932

**1933**

Hitler takes power in Germany

**1935**

Congress passes first Neutrality Act

◆ 1937

**1937**

Japan attacks China

★ *An American Story* ★

Dorothy Thompson

In August 1934, American journalist Dorothy Thompson received an urgent call from the porter at her Berlin hotel. A member of Germany's secret state police wanted to talk to her. Thompson had been reporting on Adolf Hitler's rise to power, and she had written various anti-Nazi articles for the American press. In one she described the beautiful singing she had heard at a Hitler youth camp, where thousands of boys ages 10 to 16 marched and sang. The boys' lovely voices echoing across the hills stirred Thompson, but the words on an enormous banner hanging across one hillside chilled her:

“It was so prominent that every child could see it many times a day. It was white, and there was a swastika painted on it, and besides that only seven words, seven immense black words: YOU WERE BORN TO DIE FOR GERMANY.”

When Thompson met with the police, they ordered her to leave Germany immediately. “I, fortunately, am an American,” Thompson observed, “so I was merely sent to Paris. Worse things can happen to one.”

—quoted in *The Women Who Wrote the War*

**The Rise of Dictators**

Less than 20 years before the dictatorial German government expelled Dorothy Thompson, the future of democracy in Europe seemed bright. When World War I ended in 1918, President Woodrow Wilson had announced, “Everything for which America fought has been accomplished.” Wilson had hoped that the United States could “aid in

the establishment of just democracy throughout the world." Instead, the treaty that ended the war, along with the economic depression that followed, contributed to the rise of antidemocratic governments in both Europe and Asia.

**Mussolini and Fascism in Italy** One of Europe's first major dictatorships arose in Italy. There, a former schoolmaster and journalist named **Benito Mussolini** returned from World War I convinced that his country needed a strong leader.

In 1919 Mussolini founded Italy's Fascist Party. Fascism was a kind of aggressive nationalism. Fascists believed that the nation was more important than the individual. They argued that individualism made countries weak and that a strong government led by a dictator was needed to impose order on society. Fascists believed a nation became great by expanding its territory and building up its military.

Fascism was also strongly anticommunist. After the Communist revolution in Russia, many Europeans feared that Communists, allied with labor unions, were trying to bring down their governments. Mussolini exploited these fears by portraying fascism as a bulwark against the Communists. Fascism began to stand for the protection of private property and of the middle class. Mussolini also offered the working class full employment and social security. He stressed national prestige, pledging to return Italy to the glories of the Roman Empire.

Backed by the Fascist militia known as the Blackshirts, Mussolini threatened to march on Rome in 1922, claiming he was coming to defend Italy against a Communist revolution. Liberal members of the Italian parliament insisted that the king declare martial law. When he refused, the cabinet resigned. Conservative advisers then persuaded the king to appoint Mussolini as the premier.

Once in office, Mussolini worked quickly to destroy democracy and set up a dictatorship. Weary of strikes and riots, many Italians welcomed Mussolini's leadership. With the support of industrialists, landowners, and the Roman Catholic Church, Mussolini—who took the title of *Il Duce*, or "The Leader"—embarked on an ambitious program of bringing order to Italy.

**Stalin Takes Over the USSR** The Communists were a much larger force in Russia than in Italy. After the Russian Revolution began in 1917, the Bolshevik Party, led by **Vladimir Lenin**, established Communist governments throughout the Russian empire. In 1922 they renamed these territories the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). They then proceeded to establish control over these territories. To

do this, the Communists instituted one-party rule, suppressed individual liberties, and punished opponents. After Lenin died in 1924, a power struggle began. By 1926, **Joseph Stalin** had become the new Soviet dictator. In 1927 Stalin began a massive effort to industrialize his country. Tolerating no opposition, the effort brought about the deaths of 8 to 10 million peasants who resisted the Communist policies.

**Hitler and Nazism in Germany** Adolf Hitler was a fervent anticommunist and an admirer of Mussolini. Hitler had fought for Germany in World War I. Germany's surrender and the subsequent Versailles Treaty left him and many other Germans with a smoldering hatred for the victorious Allies and for the German government that had accepted the peace terms.

The political and economic chaos in postwar Germany led to the rise of new political parties. One of these was the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or the **Nazi Party**. The party did not represent the working class, as its name suggested, but was nationalistic and anticommunist. Adolf Hitler was one of the party's first recruits.

In November 1923, the Nazis tried to seize power by marching on city hall in Munich, Germany. Hitler intended to seize power locally

### **Picturing History**

**Supreme Soviets** Joseph Stalin (right) took over control of the Soviet Union after Lenin's death in 1924. He was determined to modernize and industrialize his nation. How many people died while opposing Stalin's leadership?



and then march on Berlin, the German capital, but the plan failed and Hitler was arrested.

While in prison, Hitler wrote his autobiography, titled *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle"). In the book, Hitler called for the unification of all Germans under one government. He claimed that Germans, particularly blond, blue-eyed Germans, belonged to a "master race" called Aryans. He argued that Germans needed more lebensraum, or living space, and called for Germany to expand east into Poland and Russia. According to Hitler, the Slavic people of Eastern Europe belonged to an inferior race, which Germans should enslave. Hitler's prejudice was strongest, however, toward Jews. He believed that Jews were responsible for many of the world's problems, especially for Germany's defeat in World War I.

After his release from prison, Hitler changed his tactics. Instead of trying to seize power violently, he focused on getting Nazis elected to the Reichstag, the lower house of the German parliament. When the Great Depression struck Germany, many desperate Germans began to vote for radical parties, including the Nazis and Communists. By 1932 the Nazis were the largest party in the Reichstag.

Many traditional German leaders supported Hitler's nationalism. They believed that if they helped Hitler become leader of Germany legally, they could control him. In 1933 the German president appointed Hitler as chancellor, or prime minister.

After taking office, Hitler called for new elections. He then ordered the police to crack down on the Socialist and Communist Parties. Storm Troopers, as

the Nazi paramilitary units were called, began intimidating voters. After the election, the Reichstag, dominated by the Nazis and other right-wing parties, voted to give Hitler dictatorial powers. In 1934 Hitler became president, which gave him control of the army. He then gave himself the new title of *führer*, or "leader." The following year, he began to rebuild Germany's military, in violation of the Treaty of Versailles.

**Militarists Gain Control of Japan** In Japan, as in Germany, difficult economic times helped undermine the political system. Japanese industries had to import nearly all of the resources they needed to produce goods. During the 1920s, Japan did not earn enough money from its exports to pay for its imports, which limited economic growth and increased unemployment. When the Depression struck, other countries raised their tariffs. This made the situation even worse.

Many Japanese military officers blamed the country's problems on corrupt politicians. Most officers believed that Japan was destined to dominate East Asia. Many also believed that democracy was "un-Japanese" and bad for the country.

Japanese military leaders and the civilians who supported them argued that the only way for Japan to get needed resources was to seize territory. They targeted the resource-rich province of **Manchuria** in northern China as the perfect place to conquer.

A group of Japanese officers decided to act without the government's permission. In September 1931, the Japanese army invaded Manchuria. After the invasion began, the Japanese government tried to end the war, but when the Japanese prime minister began negotiations, officers assassinated him. From that point forward, the military was effectively in control. Although Japan still had a civilian government, it now supported the nationalist policy of expanding the empire, and it appointed several military officers to serve as prime minister.

### **Picturing History**

**Meeting of Minds** Mussolini and Hitler are shown here meeting in October 1940. What beliefs did they share?



### **✓ Reading Check**

**Examining** How did postwar conditions contribute to the rise of dictatorships in Europe?

## America Turns to Neutrality

The rise of dictatorships and militarism after World War I discouraged many Americans. The sacrifices they had made during the war seemed pointless. Once again, Americans began to support isolationism, or the belief that the United States should avoid international commitments that might drag the nation into another war.

**The Nye Committee** Isolationist ideas became even stronger in the early 1930s for two reasons. When the Depression began, many European nations found it difficult to repay money they had borrowed during World War I. In June 1934, all of the debtor nations except Finland announced they would no longer repay their war debts.

At about the same time, dozens of books and articles appeared arguing that arms manufacturers had tricked the United States into entering World War I. In 1934 Senator Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota held hearings to investigate the country's involvement in World War I. The **Nye Committee** documented the huge profits that arms factories had made during the war. The report created the impression that these businesses influenced the United States to go to war. The European refusal to repay their loans and the Nye Committee's findings turned even more Americans toward isolationism.

**Legislating Neutrality** Worried that growing German and Italian aggression might lead to war, Congress passed the **Neutrality Act of 1935**. Based on the belief that arms sales had helped bring the United States into World War I, the act made it illegal for Americans to sell arms to any country at war.

In 1936 a rebellion erupted in Spain after a coalition of Republicans, Socialists, and Communists was elected. General **Francisco Franco** led the rebellion. Franco was backed by the Falangists, or Spanish Fascists, army officers, landowners, and Catholic Church leaders.

The revolt quickly became a civil war and attracted worldwide attention. The Soviet Union provided arms and advisers to the government forces, while Germany and Italy sent tanks, airplanes, and soldiers to help Franco. To keep the United States neutral, Congress passed another neutrality act, banning the sale of arms to either side in a civil war.

Shortly after the **Spanish Civil War** began in 1936, Hitler and Mussolini signed an agreement pledging to cooperate on several international issues. Mussolini referred to this new relationship with Germany as the Rome-Berlin Axis. The following



### Picturing History

**Anti-Fascist Propaganda** Spanish general Francisco Franco led the Fascist rebellion that received support from Hitler and Mussolini. This poster translates to "The claw of the Italian invader intends to make slaves of us." How did the United States respond to these events?

month, Japan aligned itself with Germany and Italy when it signed the **Anti-Comintern Pact** with Germany. The pact required the two countries to exchange information about Communist groups. Together Germany, Italy, and Japan became known as the **Axis Powers**, although they did not formally become allies until September 1940.

With the situation in Europe getting worse, Congress passed the Neutrality Act of 1937. This act continued the ban on selling arms to nations at war, but it also required warring countries to buy nonmilitary supplies from the United States on a "cash-and-carry" basis. If a country at war wanted goods from the United States, it had to send its own ships to pick up the goods, and it had to pay cash. Loans were not allowed. Isolationists knew that attacks on neutral American ships carrying supplies to Europe had helped bring the country into World War I. They were determined to prevent it from happening again.